

House Passes Rothman's School Safety Enhancements Act

Measure will increase authorization to \$50 million, lower financial burden on local grantees, and require annual campus safety assessments

Congressman Rothman
talks with 5th graders in Jersey
City about school safety and the importance of
education

(Washington, DC)—Today, the U.S. House of Representatives unanimously passed the School Safety Enhancements Act (H.R. 2352), introduced in May 2007 by Congressman Steve Rothman (D-NJ). This legislation would expand Rothman's successful Secure Our Schools program, passed into law in 2000, which provides funds to help local governments pay for security equipment and training in their schools.

"Whether it is fighting terrorism or working to keep our schools free of violence, I have always believed that the government's first responsibility is to protect the people. Our government must help to ensure that our children are safe and protected from violence of any kind in school. I am proud to report that this Congress has taken another step to ensure a safe learning environment for our children by passing my School Safety Enhancements Act," said Rothman.

In 2000, as a member of the House Judiciary Committee, Rothman, along with then Judiciary Chairman Henry Hyde (R-IL), wrote the Secure Our Schools Act. Secure Our Schools is a matching federal grant administered by the Community Oriented Policing Services (COPS) Office, of the Department of Justice. Under this program, specific security measures are not mandated by the federal government. Rather, the funds assist local school districts with the costs of those measures they choose to enact. Secure Our Schools gives grantees the opportunity to establish and enhance a variety of school safety equipment and programs to continue to improve school safety efforts within their communities. These grants may be used to install metal detectors, locks, improved lighting, and provide security

training to school personnel in order to help keep students safe.

Last year, after the tragic events that took place at Virginia Tech, Rothman introduced H.R. 2352, the School Safety Enhancements Act. H.R. 2352 improves upon the Secure Our Schools Act. Most notably, it makes the program more affordable to schools by increasing the federal share of elementary and secondary school security upgrades from 50% to 80% and lowering the local responsibility to 20%. It also increases federal funding authorized for these grants from \$30 million to \$50 million, and expands the list of uses for these grants to include the creation of safety hotlines.

H.R. 2352 also addresses safety on college campuses, which was a clear priority for Rothman and Senator Barbara Boxer (D-CA), who introduced the Senate version of the bill, in the wake of last year's tragic shooting at Virginia Tech. Specifically, the legislation also requires all institutions of higher education to assess campus safety on an annual basis and develop an emergency response plan to prepare for emergency situations, including natural disasters, active shooter situations, and terrorist attacks. The details of those plans and safety assessments are left to the discretion of colleges and universities.

The School Security Enhancements Act has 55 co-sponsors in the House and was introduced in the Senate by Sens. Barbara Boxer (D-CA), Frank Lautenberg (D-NJ), Ken Salazar (D-CO), Charles Schumer (D-NY), Edward Kennedy (D-MA), Richard Durbin (D-IL), and Sherrod Brown (D-OH). The bill will now be sent to the U.S. Senate for consideration.

Rothman currently sits on the House Appropriations Committee, which makes decisions about all federal spending, and the House Committee on Science and Technology.

For Immediate
Release: September 17, 2008

Contact: Bob Decheine, (202) 226-8360; (202)
550-7869 [cell]

###